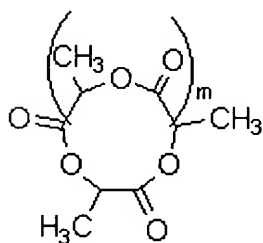


AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (Original): A method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer represented by the following formula (1):



(1)

wherein m represents an integer of 1 to 30,

wherein lactides are polymerized in the presence of an alkali metal compound represented by the following formula (2):



wherein R represents an aliphatic group, aromatic group, $-\text{Si}(\text{R}^{10})(\text{R}^{11})(\text{R}^{12})$, $-\text{CH}(\text{R}^{20})\text{CONR}^{21}\text{R}^{22}$ or $-\text{CH}(\text{R}^{30})\text{COOR}^{31}$, wherein each of R^{10} , R^{11} and R^{12} independently represents an aliphatic or aromatic group, R^{20} represents an aliphatic group, each of R^{21} and R^{22} independently represents a

hydrogen atom, aliphatic group or aromatic group, R^{30} represents an aliphatic group, and R^{31} represents a hydrogen atom, aliphatic group or aromatic group;

Y represents $-O-$, $-S-$ or $-NR^{40}-$, wherein R^{40} represents a hydrogen atom, aliphatic group or aromatic group; and

Me represents an alkali metal.

Claim 2 (Original): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 1, wherein said alkali metal compound is a compound of formula (2) wherein R represents an alkyl group having 1 to 12 carbon atoms, aryl group having 6 to 30 carbon atoms, $-\text{Si}(R^{10})(R^{11})(R^{12})$, $-\text{CH}(R^{20})\text{CONR}^{21}R^{22}$ or $-\text{CH}(R^{30})\text{COOR}^{31}$, wherein each of R^{10} , R^{11} and R^{12} independently represents an aliphatic or aromatic group, R^{20} represents an aliphatic group, each of R^{21} and R^{22} independently represents a hydrogen atom, aliphatic group or aromatic group, R^{30} represents an aliphatic group, and R^{31} represents a hydrogen atom, aliphatic group or aromatic group.

Claim 3 (Previously Amended): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 1, wherein said alkali metal compound is a compound of formula (2) wherein Y is $-O-$ or $-S-$.

Claim 4 (Previously Amended): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 1, wherein said alkali metal compound is a compound of formula (2) wherein Me is lithium.

Claim 5 (Previously Amended): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 1, wherein, in formula (1), m is an integer of 1 to 21.

Claim 6 (Previously Amended): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 1, wherein said alkali metal compound is any of:
a compound of formula (2) wherein R is an aliphatic group having 4 or more carbon atoms; a compound of formula (2) wherein R is an aromatic group and Y is -S-; or a compound of formula (2) wherein R is -CH(R²⁰)CONR²¹R²² wherein R²⁰ represents an aliphatic group and each of R²¹ and R²² independently represents a hydrogen atom, aliphatic group or aromatic group.

Claim 7 (Original): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 6, wherein cyclic lactic acid oligomer is selectively produced substantially free of chain lactic acid oligomer.

Claim 8 (Canceled)

Claim 9 (Canceled)

Claim 10 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 2, wherein said alkali metal compound is a compound of formula (2) wherein Y is -O- or -S-.

Claim 11 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 2, wherein said alkali metal compound is a compound of formula (2) wherein Me is lithium.

Claim 12 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 3, wherein said alkali metal compound is a compound of formula (2) wherein Me is lithium.

Claim 13 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 2, wherein, in formula (1), m is an integer of 1 to 21.

Claim 14 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 3, wherein, in formula (1), m is an integer of 1 to 21.

Claim 15 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 4, wherein, in formula (1), m is an integer of 1 to 21.

Claim 16 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 2, wherein said alkali metal compound is any of:
a compound of formula (2) wherein R is an aliphatic group having 4 or more carbon atoms; a compound of formula (2) wherein R is an aromatic group and Y is -S-; or a compound of formula (2) wherein R is -CH(R²⁰)CONR²¹R²² wherein R²⁰ represents an aliphatic group and each of R²¹ and R²² independently represents a hydrogen atom, aliphatic group or aromatic group.

Claim 17 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 3, wherein said alkali metal compound is any of:
a compound of formula (2) wherein R is an aliphatic group having 4 or more carbon atoms; a compound of formula (2) wherein R is an aromatic group and Y is -S-; or a compound of formula (2) wherein R is -CH(R²⁰)CONR²¹R²² wherein R²⁰ represents an aliphatic group and each of R²¹ and R²² independently represents a hydrogen atom, aliphatic group or aromatic group.

Claim 18 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 4, wherein said alkali metal compound is any of:
a compound of formula (2) wherein R is an aliphatic group having 4 or more carbon atoms; a compound of formula (2) wherein R is an aromatic group and Y is -S-; or a compound of formula

(2) wherein R is $-\text{CH}(\text{R}^{20})\text{CONR}^{21}\text{R}^{22}$ wherein R^{20} represents an aliphatic group and each of R^{21} and R^{22} independently represents a hydrogen atom, aliphatic group or aromatic group.

Claim 19 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 5, wherein said alkali metal compound is any of:
a compound of formula (2) wherein R is an aliphatic group having 4 or more carbon atoms; a compound of formula (2) wherein R is an aromatic group and Y is $-\text{S}-$; or a compound of formula (2) wherein R is $-\text{CH}(\text{R}^{20})\text{CONR}^{21}\text{R}^{22}$ wherein R^{20} represents an aliphatic group and each of R^{21} and R^{22} independently represents a hydrogen atom, aliphatic group or aromatic group.

Claim 20 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 16, wherein cyclic lactic acid oligomer is selectively produced substantially free of chain lactic acid oligomer.

Claim 21 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 17, wherein cyclic lactic acid oligomer is selectively produced substantially free of chain lactic acid oligomer.

Claim 22 (New): The method for producing a cyclic lactic acid oligomer according to claim 18, wherein cyclic lactic acid oligomer is selectively produced substantially free of chain lactic acid oligomer.